



BOOKS Written by the Reverend

Dr. SACHEVERELL, and are to be Sold
by H. Clements, at the Half-Moon-
St. Paul's Church-yard.

A Defence of Her Majesty's Title to the Crown, and
a Justification of Her entering into a War with
France and Spain. In a Sermon Preach'd before the
University of *Oxford*, on the 10th of *June*, 1702.
The Nature, Obligation and Measures of Conscience,
deliver'd in a Sermon Preach'd at *Leicester*
Affizes, *July* 25, 1706.

Of presumptuous Sins. A Sermon Preach'd before
the University of *Oxford*, *Sept.* 14. 1707.

The Communication of Sin. A Sermon Preach'd
at the *Affizes* held at *Derby*, *Aug.* 15. 1709.

The Perils of False Brethren both in Church and
State. Set forth in a Sermon preach'd before the
Lord Mayor, &c. at *St. Paul's*, *Nov.* 5. 1709.

The Duty of Praying for our Enemies. Set forth
in a Sermon preach'd at *St. Saviour's*, *Southwark*,
Palm-Sunday, 1713.

Collections of Passages in Answer to the Article
of his Impeachment.

His Speech upon his Impeachment at the Bar
the House of Lords in *Westminster Hall*, *March*
1709-10.

The Rights of the Church of *England* asserted, &c.

N^o 19

15

Sins and Vices of Mens Lives, the chief
Cause of their Ignorance and Corrupt
Opinions in Religion.

A.

SERMON

PREACH'D before the
UNIVERSITY
OF

OXFORD.

St. MART's, on December
the 11th, 1709.

WILLIAM TILLI, B.D. Fellow of C.C.C. Oxon.
and Rector of Wightham near Oxford.

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L O N D O N,

ed for Anthony Peisley Bookseller in Oxford,
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booksellers in St. Paul's Church-yard, London, 1710.

TO THE
Right Honourable
MONTAGUE
EARL of
ABINGDON,

BARON NORREYS of
RYCOT,
My Honour'd Lord and Patron,

This Discourse is, with all Respect, Gratitude
and Humility, Dedicated by

HIS LORDSHIP'S

Most Oblig'd and Dutiful

Servant and Chaplain,

William Till

T H E P R E F A C E.

THE reason of my publishing this plain Discourse was, because I was willing to contribute any assistance I could (and all that every Man can bring is no more than necessary) towards the giving some Check to that Flood of Impiety, and Corruption in Principles of Religion, that has broken in of late so far and wide upon us, and almost overwhelm'd the present Age: And, if some stop be not put to it, threatens the Ruin and Dissolution, not only of our Excellent Church of England, but even of Christianity it self amongst us. The Spring-Head and Fountain of which I have endeavour'd to trace back, to the ill Lives and Practice of Men; for thence it is the Mischief begins, and there lies the root of all our Distempers in Religion: which therefore if either we intend to remove, or would preserve what yet remains in its Integrity, 'tis there we must begin to work in our first applications.

Nothing is more sure, than that if men would think and believe right in matters of Religion, they must endeavour to live well, and that the best method to secure, or reform our Understandings from Errour and Prejudice, is to purifie our Wills and Affections from Sin; For the further men go on to make a Breach in their Consciences and Manners, they come still in so much nearer danger of making Shipwrack in their Faith. I wish we had not too many Instances in the present Times (and more, I believe, than any former Age has been infested with) of Men of wicked Lives and corrupt Interests; who for that reason endeavour to give a wrong turn to all their Notions of Good and Evil; and by the various Artifice of Iniquity to confirm and harden themselves in ill Opinions. These are the Men who arrive, by this means, at such perfection of Obstinacy, in time, that they are able to stand proof against the utmost force of Argument, that can be offer'd to the mind of Man; And will go on to retain and propagate their mischievous Doctrines, against the clearest Convictions of Light and Knowledge, of Reason and Religion to the contrary; And know how to disappoint even the Eloquence of an Angel, that should

THE PREFACE.

come at any time to persuade them against their own sinful Inclinations. These are the men of loose and wicked Lives, of dark Designs and unrighteous Interests, who set themselves in direct opposition to the whole Scheme of our Religion, and the great Mytery of Godliness; and who, because they go on so highly to affront Religion by their constant practice, endeavour therefore thus to undermine it in its Principles, and are glad to see it run down in its Reputation. 'Tis the Interest of these men, they think, to bring down Christianity to as low and contemptible a pitch as may be, in order to keep themselves up; the better to pursue their own Designs; to gratifie their Lusts, and maintain their Post and Character in the World.

'Tis for these Reasons, * some men renounce the very Articles of their Faith, venture to blaspheme God himself, and our Blessed Saviour, to dwell upon his Miracles, and to expose and ridicule the Priesthood, without which no Religion ever yet did, or ever can subsist. And is it not from hence likewise? because men give up Conscience to Interest, and sacrifice to Ambition, Pride, or Covetousness, that we see them thus run in with the corrupt stream of the Times, desert and change their old honest Principles, and contradict or null the Doctrines of the Church, to which they have subscrib'd? And which will stand good in their old sense for ever, notwithstanding all the Knavery and Malice of these men against them; and though all the Powers of Earth or Hell combine to overthrow them. 'Tis for the same reasons that such men as these I have mention'd, are wink'd at, are supported, are encouraged by others as bad as themselves; and whose Interest they serve by such Proceedings. 'Tis for these Reasons, in this prophane and degenerate Age, in this perverse and crooked Generation, that even to blaspheme Christ and his Religion shall amongst some men meet with applause, amongst others come off with more impunity, and less ill treatment at their hands, than an Honest Man, for steddily doing his duty, if he shall happen at the same time to cross these Mens factious Humour, or discountenance their reprobate Principles. For what I have more to say to these Men, I refer them to the following Discourse, and if any thing there tend to their Conversion, or Amendment, I shall have my reward in it, and think my self happy in the success of my present Design.

JOHN III

--- Men lov'd darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

IN the former parts of this Chapter our Blessed Saviour had been discoursing with *Nicodemus* upon some of the most fundamental points and articles of our Religion, of the nature, design and advantages of the Gospel he came to publish to the World, and of the means of mens admission into it. *Nicodemus* receiv'd and entertain'd doctrines of this sublime and heavenly nature, we are inform'd in part, and may guess at the rest, by the exception he took, and the objection he made to our Saviour's argument at his very first entrance on it: *How can a man be born again*, says he, and *how can these things be?* Our Saviour however goes on with his discourse to him on these Subjects, and about the conclusion of it comes and assigns a reason, not only why this ruler of the Jews found it so hard to submit his Faith to embrace the Gospel, but why really it should ever make so little progress, and meet with such constant opposition from the World; and that was indeed because of the loose and sinful inclinations of men, which would be sure to stand up and make head against it as an enemy that came to give them causes of disquiet; tho' 'tis certain 'twas design'd by the mercy of God, as the sovereign and utmost remedy for the corruptions of mens nature and the miseries of their condition. But whatever the Gospel might be in it self, or whatever design it came about, yet as long as men were under this fatal *slumber* from their sins, they would not care to be awaken'd out of it, and would either turn away their heads, or endeavour to remove at a distance from them, any light of truth, that should come to break in upon, and molest them under the present *easy*, tho' evil posture of their souls. *Men lov'd darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

By darkness in these words we are not to understand mere ignorance, but error likewise; not only a bare privation or absence of truth and knowledge, but the presence of it's contrary falsehood: indeed any thing that stands in opposition to light, that wholesome metaphor under which the doctrine of our B. Saviour and his Gospel are here represented.

The design and sense of these words of my text may be very well drawn into, and compris'd under this one easy proposition, which shall therefore be the Subject of my following discourse, namely, That the reason of that reluctance men have, and that resistance they make

against the *laws* and *doctrines* of *Christianity* is from their own vicious *lusts* and *inclinations*, which would either keep them in utter ignorance of their faith and duty, or dispose them, if that might not be done, to corrupt and pervert the doctrines of the Gospel in order to render them more compliant and less offensive to their loose and sinful practices.

In the pursuit of this doctrine I shall in the *first* place endeavour to lay before you the reasons whence it comes to pass that men are thus in love with *darkness* that they will either not see the rule of their duty, or will endeavour to pervert the right *sense* of it, to bend it to a more easy compliance with their lusts; and thus our Saviour informs us, *men love darkness because their deeds are evil.*

Secondly, I will consider how many ways men thus express their love to darkness, and by what methods they proceed thus to deceive and mislead themselves in the great concerns of Religion.

And *First*, my design is to represent the reasons, whence it comes to pass, that mens sins, their lusts and vicious habits are apt so far to darken and abuse their minds, that they either chuse not to see their duty, or apply themselves to confound and corrupt the truth, in order to make it more easily comport with their evil inclinations. To which one productive principle, I may be bold to say, almost all the poisonous opinions and heresies, that either in the former ages of the Church, or in these later days have struck at the foundation and purity of the Christian faith, do owe their rise and Original. 'Tis from the lives and practice of men that generally these *filthy Steams* arise, which thus cloud and overcast their understandings, and give so strange a turn and determination to their very thoughts; so far, that if we observe what course and train of actions a man has for some competent time pursued, we may give more than a guess to what opinions he leans, and how he stands affected as to the notions of his duty. The first acts indeed and beginning of any habit take their rise and model from the thoughts; but when the course of action once comes to be fix'd, and attended with delight and pleasure, then it begins to act by a *backward influence* upon the thoughts themselves, and to fix or change them according to the present *stream* of *habitual inclination*: Men come to think in time as they wish, they wish according to their *inclinations*, they derive their *inclinations* from *moral habits*, and these are produced by a *frequency* of acting any way, whether good or evil. But I shall now set my self more immediately to shew what influence and tendency a corrupt and vicious practice has to incline men either to reject or oppose the true Religion, and for what reasons.

First, because the light of truth would discover to an ill man the baseness and deformity of sin and vice, and make him a terror to himself, by representing him in his true colours, under all the corruptions and filthiness of his present state; and this he desires not to see.

Secondly, 'twould convince him of the great danger of his present course, and by consequence of the necessity of reforming it, which cannot be done, he imagines, without great trouble, and therefore desires not to think of it.

Thirdly, it would take off the edge of his relish, and abate the eagerness

ures, and these he cannot endure to part with.

And First, the light of truth would represent him truly to himself, which would be a terrible sight indeed, and therefore all possible care must be taken that so troublesome a guest be not admitted. Therefore 'tis, our Saviour tells us in the words immediately after my Text, *that he hates the light, neither comes to the light, he dares not approach it lest his deeds should be reprov'd*, and made appear to be really what they are. For there is indeed so much *modesty* still left even in the most corrupt and deprav'd natures, from a secret principle of shame that God has hid within the consciences of men, that let a man be at never so much pains with himself, he can never thoroughly reconcile sin and vice to his own reason and private approbation. 'Tis true he may by a *glamorous* and *tumultuous* way of life, and by the advantage of his outward state and fortune make a shift to get above the opinions of other men, and perhaps *boast* and vaunt himself openly that he can do *mischiefs*, and so for a while drown and silence the reflections of his own mind, in the height and hurry of his passion. But upon the first occasion, in the *calm* and *cool* of the day, his thoughts of his own evil doings then return upon him with a redoubled force, fill him with a silent *confusion*, and smite him with a secret *sting* which he cannot bear. And after he has been a long time *labouring* with his sin, and at last brought forth his iniquity, after all his pains and travel in evil, he presently turns and starts at his own production, and would willingly disown it, and fly from it, and even from himself, from the rebukes and censures of his own mind. And therefore when the convictions of religion and conscience come thus to press him hard, he *eludes* by all means to *strangle* his reason and thought, and to *overwhelm* all sober reflections that meet him, in any foolish or absurd diversion how bad soever, that will any way promise to sooth his pain, or simplify his present sense of it. Which is a very strong and convincing argument, by the way, that the distinctions of vice and virtue are laid a great deal deeper than in the mere opinions of men, and that they do not according to a late sort of *wild philosophy*, & *Hobbes* depend upon the *arbitrary customs* and *constitutions* of mankind, but that the ground of our perception of the vast difference between them, is *interwoven* in our nature, and brought into the very frame and constitution of our being. This seems to appear if from no other argument, yet sufficiently from hence, from that wonderful *agreeableness* that actions of piety and virtue have to the best sense and relish of mens minds, and the *disagreeableness* of the contrary, and the utter *abhorrence* that our nature carries in it to sin and vice: so far, that a man cannot, by all his artifices, upon cool thoughts, avoid or overcome the shame and upbraidings of his own reason, that attend a loose and wicked course of life. Upon this account therefore a state of sin must ever be an irreconcilable enemy to the knowledge of God's will and law, in as much as this would bring out the sinner to his shame, into clear and open light, and leave him *defil'd* and loathsome in his own eyes. And therefore he thus endeavours to shut them as fast as he can, and is willingly ignorant of the rule of his duty

may have learnt by the *deceitfulness of sin*, to pass a cheat upon the world about him, who cannot see his thoughts, nor look into the *rottenness* of his heart, yet when the *scourge of God's law* sounds in his ears, and the *book of life* lies open to the view of his mind, he *wrembles in secret*, and dares not behold, and therefore seeks to draw a veil of ignorance or error before his eyes, that he may not be forc'd to condemn himself, to his own confusion. And by this means, tho' against his will, he gives the strongest evidence and testimony to the *word of God*, that can be, which yet he refuses to ac-

Heb. 4. 12. knowledge: by his own behaviour he proves it to be *quick and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder the soul and spirit, the joints and marrow; and that 'tis a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* And if he would but look sufficiently into it, he is too sensible it would present him with a sight too terrible for him to behold, of all his base and *treacherous dealings* with the great God and Author of his being, and best Benefactor of his life: 'Twould bring to his remembrance from what he is fallen; that he has stain'd and polluted the dignity of his nature, and sunk himself into a condition worse than of a Beast; and force him to lament and bewail himself in the *dust*. 'Twould search and try his heart to the bottom, and leave no corner of corruption in it undiscovered. It would rip up all

his base designs, and unmask his hypocritical pretences, and make the thick *scales of spiritual blindness* drop from off his Eyes, that he might see his own *vileness and misery*, with a clear and uninterrupted view. And such thoughts and such a view as this he cannot bear, because 'twould sink his courage to the ground, and put him into utter disgrace with, and detestation of himself for ever. This, this would be the case of every grievous sinner, could he come to a right sense of his condition. And because it would be so, and he suspects it would, on that account he so carefully avoids the *light*, or, which comes to the same, endeavours to *quench and stifle it*. 'Tis for this reason that

the Apostle brands the sinful actions of men under the *disgraceful title of works of darkness*, not only because *darkness* is most properly the principle from whence they flow, inasmuch as all sin whatsoever proceeds from a *present blindness* and inadvertency of mind; but upon this account more especially, because *darkness* is the proper *Region* and covering under which such works would, if 'twere possible, lie conceal'd for ever, and even escape the eyes and thoughts of those that do them. So far then is a sinful life a friend to *darkness*, in that *light* is the greatest enemy it can have, making all its *spots of pollution* appear, and reflecting the greatest dishonour and reproach upon it.

But then *secondly*, the *light of divine truth*, the principles of *religion and conscience*, would convince a wicked man likewise of the infinite danger of his present course, and by consequence of the necessity of reforming it; and this cannot be done, he thinks, without great trouble, and therefore desires not to be disturb'd about it. Which, one would think, should be a strong and powerful argument

argument on the contrary, that because he at least suspects himself
in so much danger, he should therefore be the more concern'd be-
fore it is too late, to look out for the means of its prevention. But
we are not to expect that a man enslav'd under the power and do-
minion of sin should act reasonably in any matters, that relate to his
spiritual condition. Habits of sin and vice do, both by a natural and
judicial consequence, so blind and infatuate the minds of men, that
they go perfectly the reverse to the principles of reason and nature,
and take the nearest method to their ruin, while they think they are
providing most for their own security. 'Tis impossible otherwise
that a man of common understanding, and in whom the principle of
self-preservation is not quite extinct, should chuse, only for his pre-
sent ease, not to apprehend a danger, which, unless he does, is a
snare after irrecoverable, the sad consequence of which he must feel
and rue for ever. But when we go on to consider the matter a little
more nearly, we shall find wherein 'tis this strange power of sin, to
deceive men in a matter of such infinite consequence, lies; and what
that thus betrays them to their ruin.

This is the fatal Snare of Sinners, the secret grin that takes them
by the heel, and retains them in darkness, the strong
opinion that lies at the bottom of their hearts, that Job 18. 19,
they once come to look thoroughly into the busi-

ness of Religion, into the punishments and terrours it denounces to
obedience, they shall then be no longer able to hold up their Fa-
ces, or justify their practices with any courage; or with any appear-
ance of reason, be able to account to themselves for their own pro-
ceedings. And that every sin they commit after a thorough convicti-
on of their danger, will be an eternal blot upon the reputation of
their wisdom, and be constantly checking and upbraiding them with
their own desperate madness and folly. And this obliges the sin-
ner, in pursuance of his secret and steadfast resolution, not to change
the course of his life, to look as little into the rules and doctrines of
Religion, and to be as little acquainted with the arguments and
representations of another World, as may be. For, under the force
of such convictions, there is no way left to escape the
reproaches of his own thoughts, the constant and cutting reproach-
es of his reason, but by entering upon new resolutions, and taking
a new course, and changing the whole course and tenour of his pra-
ctice. But this, he concludes, is attended with so

much difficulty; there are so many Lions of mastery Prov. 26. 13.
and beastly inclinations to be encounter'd with.

In the way of his duty, that he can never expect to be a match for,
and to overcome them; and therefore chuses to ly down tamely
under present pollutions, and that he may do so quietly, turns his
back on the wall, from seeing the heavy Judgment that awaits him,
which he is infinitely jealous will shortly take hold of him in a
new World. This is the fatal influence of sin; that it robs a
man of his virtue and innocence, and then infeeble all the
powers of his Soul; and quite dissipates all resolutions of recovery.

Remember, and shew your selves men, bring it again
to mind, O ye Transgressors! Where is that vigorous Isaiah 46. 8.
principle of Spirit and resolution which God

has put within your breasts? awake from this deadly slumber, *arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.* A beam of that light from Heaven struck upon the Soul, will pierce it through; will rouse and quicken a Man even under this senseless benumm'd condition of his spiritual state.

Another great hindrance of mens enquiries into the matters Religion is, *Thirdly*, this, that a quick and lively sense of the things, of the powers and arguments of *another World*, would take off the edge of their resist, and abate the vigour of their inclination to what they only value, the present unlawful pleasures and interests of this life; and *these* they cannot endure to think of parting with. And so far these men are certainly in the right, that a lack of knowledge of, and a thorough acquaintance with their duty, would effectually cool and allay that distemper'd heat of their desires, which they pursue the sinful enjoyments and pleasures of this World for this is indeed their disease, and Religion is design'd on purpose to remove it. But then this surely ought to be no objection against themselves; for why are they better inform'd, as they might be with a little care, of the pleasures that are to be had in exchange, in the way of their duty, of an infinitely more refin'd and excellent nature than those of sense. And therefore to stick and cleave so eagerly to these, to the prejudice, or forfeiture of those that are so far more desirable, is the greatest instance of weakness and making a foolish bargain, that can be, which yet these men are so much afraid of being censur'd for.

'Tis as if a man should be fond of a fever, and not care to get rid of it, because it gives a sharp and quick relish to his present draught: when those that stand by, and know the pleasure of health, would only take such a man to be so much farther gone from his phrensy, and therefore conclude that he stood in need of a more immediate care, and present remedy.

But whatever religious men may think, or wise men may argue of the pleasures of another world, yet when the gust and relish of another world comes once to be deeply deprav'd by a long train and course of sinful enjoyments, nothing that can be said will ever come near or touch the heart of such a sensualist; all the inclinations of the Soul draw one way, and nothing shall find admittance to his thoughts, but what comes to gratify him in his own sense, and he will not take him advice how to satisfy his present worldly lusts and interests. His desires run all gross and dreggy, and he has no more apprehension of, or affection for any other goods, but those that lie before his senses, than a blind man has of colours, or any other sense of an object that is unproportion'd to it by nature.

Now allowing this man's principles, that there is nothing to be desired for a man indeed than to eat and drink, and to enjoy himself, Eccles. 8. 15. *his Soul enjoy sensual pleasure, he is certainly in the right in his conclusion, that the restraint of Religion would only breed disturbance to him, and therefore ought not to be allow'd access, because they would pretend to confine and hinder the man in the pursuit of what he thinks his supreme good.*

ly happiness; but therein lies his desperate and irrecoverable mi-
take.

Religion commands a man, in prospect of a bliss at present invi-
sible, to subdue and kill his worldly lusts, and to tear the dearest
objects of affection from his heart, whenever they come to be in-
consistent with his duty; to *pluck out a right eye,*
and to *cut off a right hand,* and to *mortify all our* *Matt. 5. 29.*
members upon earth, and to *cleanse our selves from* *Colos. 3. 5.*
all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, in expectation *2 Cor. 7. 1.*
and in dependence upon promises hereafter, which
will have no completion in this world. And can such arguments as
these take hold of a man whose mind is entirely earthly and sensu-
ous? 'tis impossible they ever can in his present state; and lest perhaps
they should hereafter, he is resolv'd to keep them off at a distance
from his thoughts, and to give the powers of the
world to come no advantage upon him, by a nearer *Heb. 6. 5.*
conversacion within the reach of their influence;
since they come to robb him of his present satisfactions, and he
neither knows, nor desires to be acquainted with any better. This
is the true state of the case, and these I have mention'd are the rea-
sons, that, to their own infinite unhappiness, keep off ill men from
acquaintance with those things, which it most of all concerns
them to know and consider well, the great truths of Religion, and
their own indispensable obligations to obey them. I have almost on-
ly mention'd these things, it not being so agreeable to my present
argument to stand long to expose the absurdity of them; and then
it is so very clear and evident upon the slightest reflection, that there
is no need of so doing.

I now proceed in the second place, to shew after what manner, and
by what instances more especially men express their love to darkness,
which our Saviour here so severely charges them with, in my Text,
and by what methods they proceed to deceive and abuse themselves
in the great concernments of Religion: and these in general (to
which the rest may be reduc'd) are two,

First, By keeping themselves under a gross and affected ignorance
of the doctrines, and obligations of Christianity; or,
Secondly, By a corrupt and perverse interpretation of them, and
disappointing them in their main design, the reformation of their
lives. And this latter I call *error* in contradiction to *ignorance*,
which is the mere absence and privation of truth, and supposes no de-
termination in the mind, one way or the other, either for, or against
anything; but *error* is a great deal more, and implies something of
a positive nature, to wit, wrong resolutions of judgment and opi-
nion about those things that are the subject of our thoughts.

And First, Men express what our Saviour here styles their *love of*
darkness, by keeping themselves under a gross and voluntary igno-
rance of the affairs of Religion: Which by sad experience we may
be convinc'd 'tis possible for men to do, even in a Christian Commu-
nity, where yet the doctrines of Religion are perpetually press'd
and inculcated, and where even, as the Prophet ex-
presses it, the whole land is filled with the knowledge *Isaiah 11. 9.*

of the Lord as the waters cover the Sea; where instruction abound
and where wisdom and understanding, in the language of the wi
man, utter their voice in the streets, and meet a ma

Prov. I. 20. 21. almost at every corner, in the chief places of co
course, and in the opening of the gates: yet eve

under all these great and numerous advantages of knowledge
how many men pass on their whole lives under a *supine negligence*
of Spirit, without ever coming to a true information of Religion
and their duty! I don't speak this only of the poor labouring illi
terate part of mankind, who are diverted and harass'd by the
necessities of life, and unqualified by the dulness and slowness
of apprehension, to arrive at any great perfection of knowledge.
But even some men of refin'd parts and curious reflection in other
matters, yet when you enter with them upon a discourse of Religion,
they betray such an *inadvertence*, such an *unapprehension* of
Soul, even in the plain truths and doctrines of Christianity, that
man would stand surpriz'd, and hardly think so great an ignorance
under such happy opportunities possible in nature, if he did not find
it true in fact. And what should be the reason of this? But that
these men have entertain'd some secret *lust*, or vicious inclination,
which turns away their minds from beholding the truth, and *hideth*
knowledge from their eyes. And then let a man's parts and faculties
be what they will, if he will not reflect and consider, there is no
remedy, he must continue ignorant: especially in matters of Religion,
that relate almost purely to another world, and lie so quite
cross to the main designs and interests of *this*. In these things
that concern our spiritual estate, there is more than ordinary
attention requir'd to give a man a true sense and apprehension
of them, even under the same and equal advantages. Because the minds
of the generality of men lie under great moral indispositions, and
have need to be thoroughly awaken'd, and are perpetually apt to
start and fly off from considerations of a nature so little grateful to
their present sense: so that, before mens minds will be duly pre
par'd for the reception of these things, and become

Isa. II. 3. of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord,
the Prophet *Isaiah* styles it, there are a great many
preparations necessary; a great many prejudices to be remov'd, and
mistakes and false views in the notion of good and happiness to be
rectify'd, and men are to be deliver'd from under the wrong byas of
their false and vicious interests, and to be at least under an indiffer
ency in order to their receiving benefit from instructions of the
nature. And because most men will not be at the pains with them
selves, to bring their minds to this frame and temper I have men
tion'd, there lies the unhappy ground of that *darkness* and igno
rance of their duty, the sad effects of which discover themselves too
much in their practice, and the ill conduct of their lives.

The Second step men take to *wrapp themselves in darkness*, and
to be secure from the uneasy convictions of light and truth, under
a sinful state of life, is by a corrupt and perverse interpretation of
the doctrines and principles of Religion, by this means to break the
force, and disappoint the main design of Religion, the reformation

of their lives. And this is their great sin of *error*, as the former was of *ignorance*, but both arise from the same principle, the same *root of bitterness in their* Heb. 12. 15. *Souls*, both proceed with the same design, and determine in the same miserable event, which is to sin on without disturbance or molestation. Ill Men contrive to throw dirt upon the beauty of holiness, to stain and sully Religion by a *perverse handling* of it, so as to bring it to their own humour, and to an *aspect* favourable on their own ill practices. And that no part of it may escape the pollution of their hands, they endeavour to *blacken* and *traduce* in both it's capacities, it's *precepts* of life, and it's *doctrines* of belief.

And First, it's *precepts* they endeavour to evacuate, by a vain pretence, that they direct us far above our strength, above all the proportion, and all assistances of humane nature. That in the sense they generally *are*, and, as we say, *ought* to be understood, they are *hard sayings*, that no man is able to support the weight and burden of them; That to comply with them in a strict and rigorous sense would be to renounce all the pleasures and comfort of living, and to be at a continual contest and struggle with our selves; that God and Nature never put such strong inclinations into our Souls on to rack and torture us, by a violent restraint and confinement of them, and therefore that these strong natural, *as they say*, and, as we are sure, *vicious propensities*, are plain indications that the God and Author of nature intended we should gratify them to the full; and consequently, to assert that God Almighty has bound up our liberty, from what he has given us such eager and passionate desires, is to represent him as a *cruel and hard master*, that intends only to mock us, and sport himself in the *misery* of his creatures. Such these are the vain *apologies* that men of loose and profligate lives make to hide and palliate their vices. And are not all these so many plain calumnies upon Religion, and the Holy word of God? What there to be found in the whole rule of our duty, which it would be the beauty and perfection of our nature to observe? Does the *wise God* demand any thing of us above our natural strength, where he takes care by his *Holy Spirit* to provide us with a *principle of grace* more than equal to any difficulty we meet with? He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world. 1 John 4. 4. And says the blessed Apostle. Nor does God forbid us any pleasure, which it would not really be our hurt to enjoy; and what part with of this nature for his sake he makes us infinitely more amends for, in the peace and satisfaction of our own conscience, in those *joyous and blisful reflections*, that by our obedience we are admitted to his *favour*, which is above all pleasures, even better than life it self. So that these reflections upon Religion, as it is the rule of our practice, appear from hence to be mere impudent slanders, and prophane suggestions of a *corrupt and naughty heart*, and the sad and deplorable consequences of an *impure and sinful life*; As I could say more at large, were it so immediately to my present purpose; which is not so much at this time to *disprove*, as to *represent* to you the false accounts these men give of our Religion, and what reasons; and by which they impose upon themselves, and

corrupt

corrupt others, in these their wicked blasphemies, Psal. 73. 8. talking against the most high God; the main and original design of which, is to screen themselves from the guilty reflections of their own consciences, and the just reproaches of the world for living as they do. For, if they can but persuade themselves and others of the truth of these loose and Atheistical cavillings at Religion, the main difficulty, they know, is over, and the great objection against a wicked and sensual life answer'd, and disappointed of its force: Because then the comparison between their life and the rule of it will be less odious, the more they can bend and ply that rule to their own vicious humour and interests: According to the grave advice of that famous Cardinal, whose holy Counsel it was, that mens lives could not come up to the strictness of Religion, therefore they must try to bring down Religion to their lives: in which assertion of his, I say he gave a true account of his own Religion, spoke the real sense and aim of all loose, profligate, Atheistical men like himself.

But men of this stamp and character are not satisfied only to wound and pervert Religion and the Holy Scriptures, as they stand the of our practical duty, and we hope ever will do so, notwithstanding the wicked attempts of these wretches to the contrary; But the titles of our *Holy Faith* too must, suffer a diminution by their means, must be scann'd by the partial enquiries of these men. *Isaiah 30. 28. and sifted with their sieve of vanity; and the infinite knowledge and wisdom of God himself must not be allow'd to understand and reveal any thing, but what the scanty understanding of Man, even the blind, prejudic'd, benighted understanding of these sinners against their own souls, may be able to comprehend. Our faith must be made out upon principles of human Reason, they won't accept of it. Nothing must be admitted in Religion that is not of a level to the natural, that is (as the case now stands) and as we know) the depraved sense of Mankind. All mysteries must be discarded as impositions upon humane understanding; These are the great rescuers and deliverers of the world from error and prejudice, from the cruel yoke and tyranny of faith, into the spacious liberty of nature, and the benefits of a reasonable service. They must have a Religion that is easy, and more suitable to men's inclinations, that is, their vices; not one like ours, that is stiff and unyielding and inflexible, bound upon us by the strongest, and on one side the most terrible sanctions; but they must have a religion that is more compliant and manageable upon fit occasions, and one that when men have a mind to give themselves a licence in their practices will admit of a loose in its interpretation; These are the impious demands of these Men, their vain pretences, and the dangerous ends they aim at, in spreading their poisonous infections. And is it of any real design, though even of mistaken charity to mankind, that these men pretend to set up for the great Doctors and Masters of Religion themselves, and come to set others free from the usurpations of the Church and conscience, as they love to speak? Is it not for their own*

ends and interest, for peace and security in their own belov'd, detestable vices, that they endeavour thus to undermine our faith? Is it not to *entrench* and *fortify* themselves in those sins, which they are secretly determin'd not to leave? They know that every *Article* of our *Faith* is a standing protestation against them, as long as it prevails in the true Catholick sense of it, and will be an eternal reproach and rebuke upon their wicked and impious lives. But if they could be only allow'd to *debase* and *alloy* our faith, by taking it in their own sense, which they pretend is the only *reasonable* one, their main business would be done, and the truths and mysteries of Religion render'd as tame and quiet, and passive, and ineffectual as they could wish, quite drain'd and dispirited of all their ancient strength and vertue, and utterly despoil'd of all those powerful motives; by which now, *thanks be to God*, they enforce obedience upon the *lives* of men, with so much awe and authority upon the conscience. I shall only give an instance of this, in one *Article* of our Faith, that great and fundamental one of the *Divinity of the Son of God*; The denial, or erroneous exposition of which *shakes* the very frame of our Religion, and draws after it almost the ruin of the whole *Christian practice*. For by disowning Christ to be the *natural* and *only begotten Son of the Father*, we extremely sink and diminish the price and value of his sufferings for sin, and this will tend to give us the less abhorrence of evil, and we shall be with less difficulty reconcil'd to it in our practice, when we consider it was bought off at so easy a purchase. Whereas a right belief in this matter casts the blackest odium and reflection upon sin that can be, and represents it as the extreme evil; the guilt of which no less than the *blood of the Son of God himself* could expiate. And then to suppose our Saviour a mere man like our selves, would be very much to weaken the awe and authority of his Laws, and this would be a *chill* and damp upon our obedience. Besides we should by this error *disarm* our Judge, in a great measure, of that terror and vengeance with which now we believe him *cloath'd*; and which we are sure is in- Isai. 59. 17. finite; the *fiery* consequences of which we cannot hope to escape without a careful obedience to his Laws. And how could we think that a man only equal in nature to our selves should have that *power* and *interest* in the Court of Heaven, as we are told our Saviour has? And to make a question of this, would be to lessen our dependence upon his intercession, and very much abate our lively expectation of rewards and blessings from his hands; which are some of the main *finews* of our obedience, as well as the chiefest instances of it. 'Twere easy to pursue this argument farther, and to shew how it holds proportionably true in all other *Articles* of our most *Holy Faith*, a right understanding of, and assent to which afford the main Spring and encouragement to a *Holy Life*, and give the greatest discountenance and terror to an *evil one* that can be. This, I think, is a plain account of that desperate malice, that the enemies of Vertue and Religion entertain, and express against the doctrines and mysteries of Christianity. Who because they can't be quite ignorant of these things, they meet with them so often, and are encountred with their evidence at every turn, they therefore take another way to deal with them,

16 A SERMON Preach'd before, &c.

them, to break and invalidate their force, by blending and polluting the light of these Heavenly Truths with their own evil opinions, thus to cast a veil of *darkness* both over the truth and themselves, in order to excuse, or palliate their own corruptions.

And thus I have endeavour'd to shew that a man's sins and vices will make him either oppose his Religion, or turn away his eyes from it: And what do all these men do in effect? but de-

Mat. 8. 28, &c. with our Blessed Saviour, as that *foolish* people in the Gospel did, when his power prov'd destructive to them.

Swine that *perished in the waters*? whenever Christ comes in the way of these sinners, either by his word, or by his Ministers, and would remove and cure their brutish inclinations: as he makes his approaches towards them, they go out to meet him, as that people did, not

to conduct him in, but to prevent and stop his further progress, and, like them also, when they see him, they desire him that he would depart out of their coast. And

Job 21. 14. with the prophane libertine in Job they say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy

ways. From which so grievous sin of these men, and the dreadful consequences of it, the removal and desertion of God's Grace and Holy Spirit in this World, and an eternal banishment from his glorious presence in the World to come, God of his infinite Mercy deliver us all, for Jesus Christ his sake, to Whom with the Father and the Blessed Spirit, be rendred all praise, honour and glory, might, majesty, and dominion, throughout all Churches of the Saints, now and for ever Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us all evermore

F I N I S.